

Performance Management programme boosts service quality for South Ribble Council

London, UK. January 10, 2007. The quality of Customer Service at South Ribble Borough Council has been transformed following a comprehensive review of existing business practices and the creation of a dedicated customer contact centre.

The programme of reviewing existing processes started two years ago following a 'good with prospects to improve' CPA rating from the Audit Commission and has led to a complete overhaul of many customer-facing processes, operations and technologies. It has also led to the creation of the South Ribble 'Gateway'.

Formally opened in May 2005, the South Ribble Gateway is a modern and welcoming customer-facing facility that includes the Council's main reception, a One Stop Shop 'front office' and a customer contact centre. The Gateway facility is powered by CRM and customer contact software – including CallPlus contact centre software from Macfarlane, Front Office CRM software from Northgate and a Customer Experience Management solution from RightNow.

South Ribble Gateway began by managing customer contacts for the Council's Housing Benefits and Council Tax Benefits sections. By August 2006, customer services for Streetscene and the waste collection service (supplied through a private contractor, Enterprise plc) had been added – with Council Tax services joining in September.

80-85% of all customer contacts received by the Council are now managed through Gateway and the impact on service quality has been dramatic. The feedback from customers shows:

- **September**
 - 54% of customers report the quality of service as being Excellent
 - 40% of customers report the quality of service as being Good
- **October**
 - 72% of customers report the quality of service as being Excellent
 - 26% of customer report the quality of service as being Good

- **November**
 - 72% of customers report the quality of service as being Excellent
 - 25% of customer report the quality of service as being Good
- **December**
 - 75% of customers reporting the quality of service as being Excellent
 - 23% of customer reporting the quality of service as being Good

The transformation in customer service has been remarkable and builds upon an already high level of customer satisfaction that bucks the national trend. The technology supporting South Ribble Gateway has made a real difference, together with a programme of exceptional customer service training for all employees. South Ribble Gateway is now able to extrapolate performance management data at a push of a button. Data shows:

- Over 90% of all enquiries are resolved at the first point of contact
- Over 83% of telephone calls are answered within 20 seconds
- Fewer than 5% of calls are abandoned

In November 2006, South Ribble Council applied to the Audit Commission for a CPA re-assessment with a view to being rated 'excellent'.

The Role of Technology

Technology has played a major part in the transformation according to Councillor Mark Alcock, Corporate & Support Services Cabinet Member at South Ribble Borough Council. "In recent times, we have seen a 40%+ performance improvement in the Benefits section pre-dominantly through customer service improvements" he states. "CRM and contact centre technology has enabled us to automate a significant number of processes and to boost efficiency."

Macfarlane CallPlus contact centre technology intelligently routes all incoming calls to appropriate Advisors, records calls, and provides both automated call handling (IVR) and detailed management reporting.

"The Macfarlane implementation was a breeze compared with many other technology implementations we've been involved with" said Ian Parker, Head of Customer Service and Benefits at South Ribble Borough Council. "Planning was well controlled and our IT personnel were given proper lead in times. Documentation was also excellent and delivered on time, while

the telephony training was well structured and well delivered. We went live without incident. The Macfarlane help desk has since been brilliant on the rare occasions that we've needed it."

Today, well over 60% of customer contacts with the Council are by phone, the rest split between face-to-face, web, letter, email and fax. 15 Gateway Customer Service Agents currently work within the South Ribble Gateway operation. All personnel are multi-skilled with each rotating their duties between the contact centre, the reception area and front office duties.

A Focus on Performance Management

At the heart of changes within the Borough is a new focus on process re-engineering and performance management.

Before services are migrated into South Ribble Gateway, they are thoroughly reviewed and re-engineered to maximise efficiency and improve effectiveness. CRM scripts are designed to ensure Gateway Agents will either resolve customer queries at first point of contact or, for more complex enquiries, gather sufficient information for resolution within the Back Office(s).

Re-engineering has had a dramatic impact on services:

- The current Government upper quartile target for processing Benefit Claims is 36 days: South Ribble Council was averaging around 40 days. Following a Performance Management review, the claim processing procedure was changed: Visiting Officers are now sent to the homes of customers to assist with form completion
 - This change has reduced the average claim processing time to 19 days. On one occasion, the time between initial contact from the customer and Benefit being assessed was a mere two hours!
- The current Government upper quartile target for processing a 'Customer Change of Circumstance' is 9 days: South Ribble Council was averaging around 12 days.
 - A Performance Management review led to the process being automated within CRM and the service migrating to South Ribble Gateway.
 - Performance is currently averaging 4 days

Since the Performance Management changes have been fully implemented, the Council has experienced a 15% rise in its Benefits case load. Councillor Mark Alcock puts this increase down

to two factors: first, because citizens now find it easier to access Benefit services and second, because they are more confident that their claims will be processed efficiently.

The changes have also cut operating costs for the Council:

- Despite the increase in case load, telephone calls to the Council since June 2006 are down 40% due to improved processes

“South Ribble Council must be congratulated on an extremely successful programme of business transformation” said William Gray, Managing Director, Macfarlane Telesystems. “Core to that success has been its forward-thinking and integrated technology approach and we are delighted to have been chosen as the council’s contact centre partner.”

About Macfarlane

Founded in 1987, Macfarlane develops and supplies communication solutions to service providers, enterprises and public sector organisations. Its CallPlus platform supports a range of applications including Contact Centre, IVR, Recording, CTI and Unified Communications. Its SpeechPlus platform supports Speech Recognition, IVR and other speech-driven applications such as its Automatic Voice Dialler.

Macfarlane has established a strong position in the public sector, assisting over 70 local councils in reaching e-government targets and providing citizen-centric service while working within Best Value practices. These customers include Government Partnerships such as Somerset Direct Partnership, the Warwickshire On-line Partnership, the Cornish Key Partnership and the Lancashire Direct project. CallPlus enables these Partnerships to link their many local councils and create single 'virtual' contact centres that serve citizens on a county-wide basis. Macfarlane delivers solutions directly and through strategic partnerships with Lagan, Northgate, Capita and Steria. <http://www.macfar.co.uk>

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